



## World Class by Diageo India Reveals Its 2026 Top 100 Bartenders

*The Top 100 sees its strongest Tier 2 representation yet, with Pune leading the mix and other cities such as Kochi, Coimbatore, Trivandrum, Indore and Dehradun well represented alongside metros*

*Ingredients that stood out in this year's shortlist were Banana, Jaggery, Toasted Rice, and Mushroom*

*Sours emerged as the most common starting point, followed by Highballs, Old Fashioneds, and Rob Roy-style cocktails*

*Stirred, built, and long drinks feature prominently, and women make up 14% of the total shortlisted list*

**India, January 23, 2026:** World Class India by Diageo has announced the Top 100 shortlisted bartenders for its 2026 edition, offering a snapshot of where bartending across South Asia stands today, and where it is headed next. Bringing together talent from India, Nepal and Sri Lanka, the shortlist reflects a bar community that has grown more confident over time, shaped by sustained investment in education and skill-building through platforms such as World Class.

At this stage of the competition, bartenders were challenged to start with a classic cocktail and reinterpret it through their own lens, using Johnnie Walker Black Label as the base. What emerged from these submissions is a clear picture of how today's bartenders are thinking, grounded in classic structure, yet expressive in flavour and technique, while also drawing more on local ingredients and culinary approaches.

### **The Top 100 at a Glance**

The geographic spread of this year's Top 100 shows Tier 2 cities featuring more prominently than ever, led by Pune, alongside cities such as Kochi, Coimbatore, Trivandrum, Indore and Dehradun, even as participation remains strong across metros. Regionally, the West leads with 27 bartenders, followed by the South (22), the North (20), and the East (11), while Sri Lanka and Nepal contribute 10 bartenders each. This broader dispersion shows that bartending is being taken more seriously as a profession across cities, nurtured by the opportunities and exposure built over 12 years of World Class, with Diageo acting as a catalyst through training and mentorship. From over 800 entries, this edition also has the highest number of women bartenders in the platform's history, with participation continuing to grow year on year, supported by initiatives such as Diageo's 'Our Hive' and its wider diversity-focused talent programmes.

### **The Classics that Bartenders are Working With**



When asked to reinterpret a classic, bartenders consistently returned to a group of established formats. Sours emerged as the most common starting point, followed by Highballs, Old Fashioneds, and Rob Roy-style cocktails.

These were the most popular classics reinvented across regions:

- **North India:** Sours
- **South India:** Highballs
- **West India:** Rob Roy-style cocktails
- **East India:** Highballs
- **Sri Lanka:** Old Fashioned
- **Nepal:** Sours

### **Flavours that stood out in The Top 100 Cocktail Submissions**

- Sweeteners such as jaggery, honey and banana saccharum.
- Toasted and infusion-led rice and grain notes.
- Spices including cardamom, cinnamon, clove, ginger, turmeric and star anise.
- Herbal and floral ingredients such as sandalwood, chamomile, tarragon, hibiscus, and pandan.
- Savoury and umami flavours, including umami cordials and vermouths, soya, mushroom, olive, mustard oil and black salt.
- Tropical and native fruits such as guava, chickoo, banana, litchi and coconut water.

**Anchal Kaushal, Vice President, Customer Marketing, Diageo India**, said, *“It has been encouraging to see the diversity of talent coming through this year’s Top 100, particularly from tier 2 cities and among women bartenders. Across regions, the bar community is showing greater confidence in their craft and communication with guests. World Class plays an important role in supporting this kind of long-term growth through education, mentorship, and global exposure. Seeing how this talent is already shaping up has been exciting, and we’re looking forward to how the competition unfolds.”*

### **What is Next for World Class**

The Top 100 will now compete at four Regional Finals, where the field will be narrowed down to the Top 16 bartenders:

- **North (Gurgaon/Delhi):** January 29
- **East (Kolkata):** February 2
- **South (Bangalore):** February 4
- **West (Mumbai):** February 11



In parallel, World Class Cocktail Festivals will take place in Mumbai and Gurgaon in February and March, respectively, giving consumers a chance to experience the ideas, flavours, and talent shaping this year's competition.

From the Top 16, one bartender will eventually be crowned India's World Class Champion at the National Finals, going on to represent the region at the Global Finals in September 2026. At every stage, World Class continues to function as a platform focused on discovery, development, and long-term opportunity, supporting bartenders well beyond a single competition cycle.

For more details on the full Top 100 list, please visit: <https://www.instagram.com/worldclassin/>.

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### **About Diageo India**

Diageo India is among India's leading beverage alcohol (alcobev) companies with an outstanding portfolio of premium brands. A subsidiary of Diageo Plc., it is listed in India on both the National Stock Exchange (NSE) and the Bombay Stock Exchange (BSE) under the name United Spirits Limited (USL).

Headquartered in Bengaluru, Diageo India has one of the largest alcohol manufacturing footprints in India, with 36 facilities across the country. It manufactures, sells and distributes Johnnie Walker, Black Dog, Black & White, VAT 69, Antiquity, Signature, The Singleton, Royal Challenge, McDowell's No1, Smirnoff, Ketel One, Tanqueray, Captain Morgan and Godawan, an artisanal single malt whisky from India, bringing together global expertise and local pride to deliver innovative, world-class products and experiences to consumers. With a strong focus on driving positive impact on society, Diageo India has been working on collective action to improve livelihoods, champion Grain-to-Glass sustainability, responsible consumption, and nurture the alcobev ecosystem to contribute to India's growth agenda.

For more information about Diageo India, our people, our brands, and our performance, visit us at [www.diageoindia.com](http://www.diageoindia.com). Visit Diageo's global responsible drinking resource, <http://www.DRINKIQ.com>, for information, initiatives, and ways to share best practices.

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